

Focal Peripheral Neuropathies, 4th ed.

Book review by Colin Chalk

Department of Neurology and
Neurosurgery, McGill University,
Montreal General Hospital, Montreal,
QC, Canada

The rise of the internet and the ready availability of electronic resources such as Up to Date have greatly changed the landscape for publishers and purchasers of medical textbooks. Many would argue that textbooks no longer have a useful role in medical education and medical practise, as web-based resources are cheaper, more easily maintained current, and can be accessed virtually anywhere.

While these are persuasive arguments, there does seem to be a continuing valuable role for certain types of textbooks, particularly single-authored works in which an expert reviews the literature, draws on personal experience, and provides concise, practical summaries of clinical issues. John Stewart's *Focal Peripheral Neuropathies* is a fine example of this type of textbook, and well-worn copies of earlier editions are to be found on the shelves of physicians worldwide. The new 4th edition appears ten years after the 3rd, and maintains the same basic structure of 4 introductory

chapters dealing with the peripheral nervous system in general, followed by 19 chapters that consider disorders of individual nerves, plexuses, and cervical and lumbar nerve roots. There are abundant clinical photographs and helpful anatomical diagrams throughout.

Readers familiar with the many qualities of earlier editions of *Focal Peripheral Neuropathies* will readily recognize these in the 4th edition. Stewart's clear prose and his ability to concisely summarize conflicting evidence in controversial or ill-defined areas (e.g., the "pronator syndrome") remain abundantly evident. His willingness to take a stand in controversial areas reflects his years of first-hand practical experience, and is a welcome contrast to the often bland and noncommittal perspective of many review articles in the medical literature. The book is exhaustively referenced (e.g., the chapter on the median nerve has over 500 citations), but frequent, concise summary paragraphs bring clarity to this vast literature.

Who should purchase the new edition of *Focal Peripheral Neuropathies*? Certainly anyone (neurologist, physiatrist, electromyographer, orthopaedic, plastic or neurosurgeon) who evaluates or treats patients with focal peripheral neuropathies and who does not have an earlier edition of this book. Those who already have the 3rd or earlier editions will value the new edition for its expanded bibliog-

Correspondence: Colin Chalk, Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery McGill University Montréal, Montreal General Hospital, Room L7-313 1650 Cedar Avenue, Montreal, QC, Canada. E-mail: colin.chalk@mcgill.ca

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raphy (there are about 30% more references), new patient and imaging figures, and its summaries of new developments in the field over the last decade. Particularly helpful is new information on peripheral nerve imaging and overviews of studies trying to better define the natural history of many focal nerve syndromes or to rigorously evaluate time-honoured treatments.

John Stewart set a high standard in earlier editions of *Focal Peripheral Neuropathies*, and the 2010 update is a worthy successor.

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